

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

McDONNELL DOUGLAS HELICOPTER CRASH *

NEAR CHALMERS, INDIANA, * Accident No.: CEN17FA127

MARCH 14, 2017 *

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Interview of: JAMES POWELL
Witness

Friday,
March 17, 2017



APPEARANCES:

DEPUTY CHIEF A.J. ALLETO
White County Sheriff's Department

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I N T E R V I E W

CHIEF DEPUTY ALLETTO: This is Chief Deputy A.J. Alletto with the White County Sheriff's Department. I'm in my police vehicle at the intersection or near the intersection of County Road 150 East and County Road 700 South at the scene of a helicopter crash. And with me in my vehicle are -- or is --

Go ahead and state your full name and your date of birth for me, please.

MR. POWELL: James Powell, [REDACTED]

INTERVIEW OF JAMES POWELL

BY CHIEF DEPUTY ALLETTO:

Q. Okay. And James, you were down here and you actually witnessed the helicopter crash; is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. And you actually recorded that on your phone, recorded the video, correct?

A. Correct.

Q. Okay. So tell me in your own words what the scene was like, what was happening when you were videoing this, why you actually were down here videoing this.

A. I stopped in because I knew they were doing this in the area, so I stopped in to just take a video to show my kids tonight. They weren't able to come to see it themselves, so I stopped in and I was taking a video. And as he was hanging the wires, he looked like he was getting pretty jumpy and whatnot, and --

1 Q. When you say he, you're meaning --

2 A. The pilot.

3 Q. -- the helicopter?

4 A. Yes, the pilot in the helicopter. And he was trying to hook
5 the tower and it looked like he made several attempts at hooking
6 it and it wouldn't quite hook right for him. And then the
7 helicopter just started bouncing real bad, and the next thing I
8 know it was in a spin and ended up on the ground in pieces.

9 Q. Okay. And after that, what happened?

10 A. People started rushing in obviously to, you know, get to the
11 victim. And --

12 Q. All right. Was it power line workers or --

13 A. Yes, power line workers. I didn't see anybody other than
14 power line workers. I stayed there for, I don't know, roughly 2
15 to 3 minutes later. And there was a puff of smoke. So once that
16 puff of smoke had cleared out and whatnot, I decided to leave the
17 scene, because I knew that the first responders and whatnot were
18 going to be coming in and I didn't want to be in their way, so I
19 ended up leaving the scene at that time.

20 Q. Okay. All right. And anything else you can think of that
21 you saw? How was the weather? What was going on?

22 A. It was sunny. There was some gust of winds coming, you know,
23 but for me to determine, you know, how bad the gust of winds were,
24 they didn't seem real bad.

25 Q. Right.

1 A. But it was -- you know, every once in a while there would be
2 a gust of wind that might end up --

3 Q. Was it snowing at the time?

4 A. No, that I -- it was not snowing that I seen.

5 Q. All right. And -- okay, so no snow at that point in time,
6 some wind but not sure how strong it was.

7 A. Yeah. Not enough to even rock my vehicle.

8 Q. Okay. All right. And when the helicopter went down did you
9 notice if the pilot remained in or not? Just go ahead and tell me
10 what you saw, what you thought.

11 A. My initial thought was that he came out of the cab, but I
12 didn't know for sure. There was so much debris. But it came down
13 on the side that he was piloted at and, you know, I could kind of
14 see that when it came down. And my initial thought was roughly 10
15 foot before he hit the ground, my initial thought was that he came
16 out of the cab. But I don't know if he did or not.

17 Q. Okay. All right. And did you ever approach the helicopter
18 or anything?

19 A. No, I did not. There were so many people in the area, I
20 wanted to stay clear from it.

21 Q. Okay. All right. Anything else you can think of that might
22 be important?

23 A. I don't -- no, not -- I don't think so.

24 Q. Okay. And was -- go ahead and describe the helicopter for
25 me.

1 A. It was a white helicopter. There was no name on it. I mean,
2 there was numbers on it, but there was no name on the helicopter.

3 Q. Okay. And about how long were you watching this thing and do
4 you remember what time it was when you started watching it?

5 A. I don't recall what time it was. It was a little after 3:00.
6 I'm going to say I watched -- which I watched him fuel up down
7 the road for probably 10 minutes. Once he took off, he had
8 approached the tower before the tower that he crashed at, and he
9 hooked the cable there and pulled the cable from that tower to
10 this tower.

11 Q. Now was that the cable to the north --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. -- or to the south?

14 A. The cable to the north.

15 Q. Okay. So he hooked on at the tower to the north and then he
16 was dragging the cable towards the south --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- is that how it went? Okay.

19 A. And once he approached the tower to the south, he was
20 attempting to hook the cable onto that tower to release himself
21 from it, but he never was successful at that.

22 Q. Okay. And just for a visual orientation, we are talking
23 about the new power line towers. One is going to be -- both
24 towers are just east of -- I'm sorry -- just west of County Road
25 150 East. One is on the north side of 700 South; one is on the

1 south side of 700 South. The helicopter crash occurred on the
2 south side of 700 South.

3 All that sound correct to you?

4 A. That sounds correct to me.

5 Q. Okay. All right. Anything else you can think of?

6 A. I don't believe so.

7 Q. Okay. Go ahead and -- I know I wrote it down, but go ahead
8 and tell me your phone number and your address as well.

9 A. My address is [REDACTED] Monticello, Indiana
10 47960. My telephone number is [REDACTED]

11 Q. Okay. Perfect. And, again, I know I've told you this or
12 asked you this several times, please do not share the video with
13 anyone. Once it becomes public, if it does -- if it ever does,
14 then you're free to go with it as far as if it ever gets anywhere
15 in the public. But for, you know, family's sake and all that kind
16 of stuff, just we'd appreciate it if it didn't get out. And I'd
17 appreciate it if you didn't even show it to anyone else.

18 A. Okay. I understand.

19 Q. All right. Thank you so much. Appreciate your help, and
20 appreciate, appreciate you getting us this video. It's going to
21 be important to the investigation. So --

22 CHIEF DEPUTY ALLETTO: This is Chief Deputy A.J. Alletto. It
23 is now 6:10 p.m., approximately, and this is the end of the
24 recorded interview.

25 (Whereupon, at 6:10 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: McDONNELL DOUGLAS HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR CHALMERS, INDIANA
 MARCH 17, 2017
 Interview of James Powell

ACCIDENT NUMBER: CEN17FA27

PLACE:

DATE: March 17, 2017

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Kay Maurer
Transcriber